



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 21st March 2024 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Dr Lucy Atkinson (LA)
- Olawale Joshua Komolafe (OJK)
- Temitope Idowu (TI)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Manoj Kumar Nagireddy (MKN)
- Moyinoluwa Olaiya (MO)
- Oluronke Oluwalere (OO)
- Rajiv Sudan (RS)
- Bob Walder (BW)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Sean Ferrie, *Head of Community Operations, HSU* (SF)
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)

1. Apologies for absence

- Hamnah Baig
- Leena Patel

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome

BW welcomed all Trustees to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Wednesday, 7th February 2024.

4. CEO Update

The Board received the CEO Update. RH highlighted the following:

- HSU Elections. On behalf of the board, RH expressed congratulations to the new Officer team for 2024/25 who were duly elected in the 4th-6th March 2024 Elections. The new President will enjoy a week’s handover with MKN at the end of June and part-time Officers take up their new roles from September. RS asked if it would be possible to receive a short biography of each new Officer.
- Recruitment of Student Trustees. OO completes her term of office at the end of this academic year and HB in November 2024, so the recruitment process is currently underway to find their successors.
- Recruitment of Director of Advocacy and Operations. Unfortunately, the first round of recruitment was not successful, and a recruitment consultancy have now been employed to assist. The advert is live, with applications closing on 24th March 2024 and interviews scheduled for later in April. RH thanked the Officers for their valuable and insightful input on the panel.
- Southern SUs Conference. The team hosted a conference for more than 100 delegates from across 19 SUs in the regional network on 22nd-23rd February 2024. The programme focused on supporting the building of networks in the sector and focused around four themes: Officer Support, Staff Development, Student Voice and HE Policy, and Community Building. It was an opportunity for SUs to share best practices, collaborate and enhance collective impact on student life. RH thanked SF and his team for their hard work in organising the event.
- Office for Students Freedom of Speech Consultation. HSU compiled a response to the OFS Freedom of Speech Consultation, considering the impacts of the upcoming regulatory approach following the approval of new legislation. A risk related to Freedom of Speech has now been added to the HSU Risk Register. However, in response to RS, RH confirmed that this is a co-owned risk between HSU and UH. The Board will continue to be kept abreast of any further updates.
- SU Awards Ceremony. This takes place on Thursday, 25th April 2024, held in the Forum, to honour the most engaged students, society committees, student representatives and SCOs.

RH

5. December Management Accounts

The Board received the February Management Accounts. RH highlighted the following:

- February has been a better-than-expected month with surplus driven by staffing underspends. Recruitment has been slow.
- Overspend in the Executive budget is due to employing the part-time Officers for more hours than budgeted for. In the first year of running a new model, it was previously a fixed cost on Officer annual salaries. For next year’s budget, this amount has been increased.
- YTD net surplus is £28,031 versus a budget deficit of £19,221. This is a positive budget variance of £47,252. The full year forecast is a net surplus of £90,049. This should come down as additional projects for spend have been identified to ensure the surplus does not get too high and to allow maximum funds, where possible, to be diverted to student facing activities. A prudent financial approach is adopted for the first half of each academic year to mitigate any commercial variations.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- UM asked for clarity on the Central Management line where there appears to be a discrepancy. RH said she would investigate with the Finance team and revert.

RH

6. Elected Officer update

The Board received the update paper from the Elected Officer team.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RH said how impressive the volume and quality of work is that the Officer team are undertaking, particularly given their part-time status. RS agreed and suggested that the team's contributions and achievements should be publicised widely.
- RS went on to ask if there was a cross-fertilisation of ideas and collaborative working amongst the Officer team given the intersectional nature of the identity of many students. MKN replied that there is indeed very strong collaboration amongst Officers who work together daily to share planning and co-operate across all projects and events.

7. University update

MW updated the Board on the current opportunities and challenges facing UH:

- Southern SUs Conference. MW thanked RH and the team for inviting her along to speak at the recent Conference, which she noted was well organised and attended.
- Exam period. MW noted this upcoming period is a challenging time for students' wellbeing and mental health, and she thanked the HSU team for the support provided in directing students to the right support and advice to assist them through this period.
- 2025-30 Strategic Plan. Work is now underway to develop the new UH strategy for the next five years and a launch email to staff has been sent from the VC about the direction the new strategy will take. This will keep to the core purposes of Research and Enterprise, Teaching and Learning, and Global Impact and Engagement, whilst thinking afresh about how transformation will appear in staff, digital infrastructure, estates and sustainability. MW said she will share the conversation with the Board as the process moves forward.
- Fee structures and payment deadlines impact on students. MW said how difficult this is to get right in the context of changing international finance. She noted that MKN and RH had been involved in recent discussions and that she was optimistic that a position could be reached which allows students the best possible access to the resources UH has whilst ensuring they are able to pay their fees at an achievable pace. She went on to note the increasing pressure on universities to control international recruitment. She said that UH are faultless when measured against competitor universities in behaviours in recruitment and are ninth in the country in respect of international recruitment.
- Postgraduate space at de Havilland campus. MW said this space is now open and is a sociable and purposeful environment in which all postgraduate students can relax and study.

BW thanked MW for the interesting update as always.

8. Elections update

The Board received the update paper. RH highlighted the following:

- A 9.4% increase in voters and votes cast, with all ten roles elected, and a nearly 80% increase in candidates on 2023.
- In respect of candidate demographics, there was a decrease in percentage of the overall candidate pool of Nigerian and British students. In terms of Home versus International split and female students standing, there has also been a significant decrease.
- In respect of voter demographics, there was an increase in students from Pakistan and India but decreases in students from Nigeria and Bangladesh. Home student voting figures were largely steady but underrepresented in terms of overall student profile. 2024 also saw a further increase in male students voting.
- As both voter and candidate demographics remain out of line with UH’s overall cohort, it was recommended to the Board that a full and thorough review of the Elections be undertaken, with a view to trialling recommendations if there are bye-elections in 2024, with a full implementation of recommendations for the 2025 Elections cycle.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked if he could have sight of the broader student demographics of UH. He also asked if it was likely there would be bye-elections during this period. RH replied that the model is designed with bye-elections in mind because nine of the ten roles are awarded to active students, with the President designed to remain in post for the entire academic year.
- LA noted that a breakdown in the data between Undergraduate and Postgraduate students would give useful information. RH replied that this was included as part of the initial Equality Impact Assessment. However, data shared today primarily reflects Postgraduate Taught students. RH agreed that there is certainly a lack of representation amongst Undergraduate and Postgraduate Research students.
- In response to TI, RH said she would like to pull together focus groups of staff and Officers as part of this review to provide real-time insight to inform the way forward. BW agreed and said it would certainly be useful to understand the ‘journey’ that students take in the decision to stand as candidates.
- OO noted that many students in the School of Health and Social Work feel a sense of disconnect and she identified a lack of unifying factors, due to the nature of their study and placements, which may go some way to explaining their lack of engagement and underrepresentation.
- OJK noted that many Black students do not engage in social activities. He recommended weekly or monthly events which would create unification among students and create a strong network amongst this community.
- BW concluded that there was clearly consensus among Board members for a review to take place, along with the beginnings of several key themes being identified. RH said she would revert with an update in due course, and she thanked everyone for their input.

9. People Committee update

UM, as Chair, updated the Board on the ongoing recruitment for the role of Director of Advocacy and Opportunities. This role has now gone back out to market with the support of a recruitment consultancy. Secondly, recruitment for the Student Trustees positions is also ongoing and an update will follow in due course.

10. Finance, Audit and Risk Committee update

RS, as Chair, updated the Board on the first meeting of the Committee. Firstly, he highlighted the legacy issue of the Students' Union Superannuation Scheme (SUSS), a pension scheme specifically for student unions, closed to new members since 2011 but remaining a functioning entity. As a founder member, HSU co-shares the liabilities, paying £8-10k each month to ensure the fund remains a going concern, until such time in 2037 when HSU will have, in effect, paid off its obligations. RS said that the Committee recommends that representatives from SUSS are invited to the next Board Meeting to provide an update to Trustees, particularly in light of the fact that other universities, such as Exeter SU and QMUL SU, have recently exited the scheme by paying off their outstanding amount in a lump sum by allying with their parent university. SUSS will also be asked for a revaluation in terms of HSU's liability. RH said that she appraised UH of this and they had shared that their pension scheme deficit had been reduced after recent revaluation so it may be that there could be a change of position for HSU. The Board agreed this as a way forward.

In addition, RS noted that there is currently a Finance Manager vacancy. He also recommended that all Officers attend an FAR Committee meeting where possible, as it provides a valuable forum for learning.

11. AOB

BW thanked all Trustees for their most valuable input at this meeting which will inform decision-making across a range of issues.

BW went on to offer his congratulations, on behalf of the Board, to RH as she celebrates 15 years with HSU and thanked her for her continued commitment, contribution and drive. He also offered further congratulations to HB and Md Sajal, former VP Activities and currently PCMS Advisor, on their recent marriage and wished them, on behalf of the Board, every happiness for the future.

OO asked if consideration could be given to the renaming of the Disabled Students' Network as she said she felt that this was rather pejorative and that it could be framed in a more positive way, such as 'Students living with disabilities.' RH thanked her for the excellent suggestion, and she said she would take it forward.

Similarly, OJK said that he felt the term 'Black' student, when referring to both African and Caribbean students, did not reflect the diversity of individuals within these communities and could, in fact, be a barrier to engagement itself. TI, however, expressed his pride in identifying with the term. Both BW and RH welcomed the range of this debate and RS concurred, noting the sensitivity of this issue around language which many felt passionate about. Both BW and RH went on to say that the review of Elections planned should certainly encompass this and it most certainly was a key outcome to get terminology right in terms of increasing engagement.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 8th May 2024 at 4.00 pm (venue tbc)

Dates for 2023/24 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm:

Thursday, 20th June 2024